NOTE ON 1-CROSSING PARTITIONS

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Abstract. It is shown that there are $\binom{2n-r-1}{n-r}$ noncrossing partitions of an n-set together with a distinguished block of size r, and $\binom{n}{k-1}\binom{n-r-1}{k-2}$ of these have k blocks, generalizing a result of Bóna on partitions with one crossing. Furthermore, specializing natural q-analogues of these formulae with q equal to certain d^{th} roots-of-unity gives the number of such objects having d-fold rotational symmetry.

Given a partition π of the set $[n] := \{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$, a *crossing* in π is a quadruple of integers (a, b, c, d) with $1 \leq a < b < c < d \leq n$ for which a, c are together in a block, and b, d are together in a different block. It is well-known [10, Exercise 6.19(pp)],[4] that the number of *noncrossing partitions* of $[n]$ (that is, those with no crossings) is the Catalan number $C_n = \frac{1}{n+1}\binom{2n}{n}$, and the number of noncrossing partitions of $[n]$ into k blocks is the Narayana number $\frac{1}{n}\binom{n}{k-1}\binom{n}{k}$.

Our starting point is the more recent observation of Bóna [2, Theorem 1] that the number of partitions of $[n]$ having *exactly one* crossing has the even simpler formula $\binom{2n-5}{n-4}$. Bóna's proof utilizes the fact that C_n is also well-known to count triangulations of a convex $(n+2)$-gon; this allows him to biject 1-crossing partitions of $[n]$ to dissections of an n-gon that use exactly $n-4$ diagonals. The proof is then completed by plugging $d = n-4$ into the formula $\frac{1}{d+1}\binom{n+d-1}{d}\binom{n-3}{d}$ of Kirkman (first proven by Cayley; see [7]) for the number of dissections of an n-gon using d diagonals.

The goal here is to generalize Bóna's result to count 1-crossing partitions by their number of blocks, and also to examine a natural q-analogue with regard to the *cyclic sieving phenomenon* shown in [8] for certain q-Catalan and q-Narayana numbers. The crux is the observation that 1-crossing partitions of $[n]$ biject naturally with noncrossing partitions of $[n]$ having a distinguished 4-element block: replace the crossing pair of blocks $\{a, c\}, \{b, d\}$ with a single distinguished *root block* $\{a, b, c, d\}$. An example is shown in Figure (a), where the 1-crossing partition of [18] having blocks $\{1, 10\}, \{2, 3, 4, 5\}, \{6, 15\}, \{7, 8\}, \{9\}, \{11, 12, 13, 14\}, \{16, 17\}, \{18\}$ is shown in its *circular representation*, with the two blocks $\{1, 10\}, \{6, 15\}$ responsible for the unique crossing pair. Figure (a) shows the corresponding noncrossing partition of $[n] = [18]$ with distinguished 4-element root block $\{a, b, c, d\} = \{1, 6, 10, 15\}$ that replaced the crossing pair of blocks.

Thus one is motivated to count the following more general objects.

Date: August 2006.

Key words and phrases. noncrossing partition, cyclic sieving phenonomenon.

This work was the result of an REU at the University of Minnesota School of Mathematics in Summer 2006, mentored by V. Reiner and D. Stanton, and supported by NSF grants DMS-0601010 and DMS-0503660. The authors also thank D. Armstrong for helpful conversations.

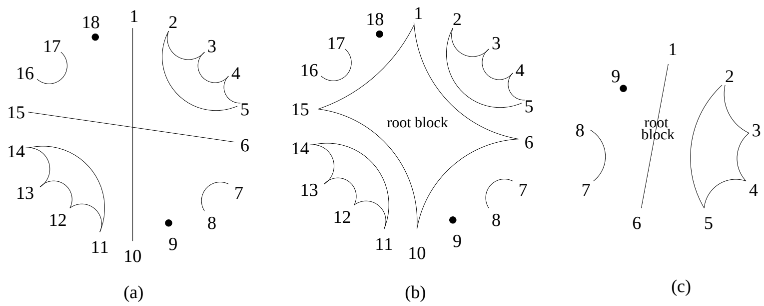

FIGURE 1. (a) A 1-crossing partition of the set [18]. (b) Its corresponding 4-rooted noncrossing partition of [18], which has 2-fold rotational symmetry. (c) The corresponding 2-rooted noncrossing partition of the set [9].

Definition 1. An *r-rooted noncrossing partition of* $[n]$ is a pair (π, B) of a noncrossing partition π together with a distinguished r-element block B of π, which we will call the *root* block.

Note that the notion of a crossing in a partition is invariant under cyclic rotations $i \mapsto i+1 \mod n$ of the set $[n]$. Consequently the cyclic group $C = \mathbb{Z}_n$ acts on the set of r-rooted noncrossing partition of $[n]$, preserving the number of blocks. For the sake of stating our result, define these standard q-analogues:

$$\begin{aligned}
[n]_q &:= \frac{1-q^n}{1-q} \\
[n]!_q &:= [n]_q[n-1]_q \cdots [2]_q[1]_q \\
\begin{bmatrix} n \\ k \end{bmatrix}_q &:= \frac{[n]!_q}{[k]!_q[n-k]!_q}.
\end{aligned}$$

Theorem 1. *The number of r-rooted noncrossing partitions of $[n]$, and the number with exactly k blocks, are given by the formulae*

$$a(n,r) := \binom{2n-r-1}{n-r}, \qquad a(n,k,r) := \binom{n}{k-1}\binom{n-r-1}{k-2}. \tag{0.1}$$

Furthermore, for any d dividing n, the number of r-rooted noncrossing partitions of $[n]$ fixed under a d-fold cyclic rotation, and the number of such partitions having exactly k blocks, are obtained by plugging in any primitive d^{th} root-of-unity for q in these q-analogues:

(0.2)

$$a_q(n,r) := \begin{bmatrix} 2n-r-1 \\ n-r \end{bmatrix}_q, \qquad a_q(n,k,r) := q^{(k-1)(k-2)} \begin{bmatrix} n \\ k-1 \end{bmatrix}_q \begin{bmatrix} n-r-1 \\ k-2 \end{bmatrix}_q.$$

Note that taking $r = 4$ and replacing k by $k-1$ in (0.1), one finds agreement with Bóna's count of $\binom{2n-5}{n-4}$, as well as the (new) formula $\binom{n}{k-2}\binom{n-5}{k-3}$ for the number of 1-crossing partitions with k blocks.

Proof. (of Theorem 1) Note that the formula for $a(n,k)$ follows from the one for $a(n,k,r)$:

$$a(n,r) = \sum_{k=1}^{n} a(n,r,k) = \sum_{k=1}^{n} \binom{n}{k-1}\binom{n-r-1}{k-2} = \sum_{k=1}^{n} \binom{n}{k-1}\binom{n-r-1}{n-r-k+1}$$
$$= \sum_{i+j=n-r}^{n} \binom{n}{i}\binom{n-r-1}{j} = \binom{2n-r-1}{n-r}$$

where the last equality is the Chu-Vandermonde summation $\binom{M+N}{\ell} = \sum_{i+j=\ell}\binom{M}{i}\binom{N}{j}$ specialized to $M := n,\ N := n-r-1,\ \ell := n-r$.

To prove the formula for $a(n,k,r)$, consider three related sets. Let $A(n,k,r)$ denote the set of r-rooted noncrossing partitions of $[n]$ with k blocks, which we wish to count. Let $B(n,k,r)$ denote the set of triples (π, B, i) in which π is a noncrossing partition of $[n]$ with k blocks, i is a chosen element of $[n]$, and B is an r-element block of π, with $i \in B$. Let $C(n,k,r)$ denote the set of noncrossing partitions of $[n]$ in which the element 1 lies in an r-element block.

Counting $|B(n,k,r)|$ in two ways, one finds

$$r \cdot |A(n,k,r)| = |B(n,k,r)| = n \cdot |C(n,k,r)|,$$

and hence

$$a(n,k,r) = |A(n,k,r)| = \frac{n}{r}|C(n,k,r)|. \tag{0.3}$$

To count $|C(n,k,r)|$, note that Dershowitz and Zaks [4] give a bijection between noncrossing partitions and ordered trees, which restricts to a bijection between $C(n,k,r)$ and the set $D(n,k,r)$ of all ordered trees having n edges, root degree r, and k internal nodes. On the other hand, the set $D(n,k,r)$ has been enumerated multiple times in the literature via generating functions and Lagrange inversion (e.g. in [3, 5]), and can also be done semi-bijectively (see [1]):

$$|D(n,k,r)| = \frac{r}{n}\binom{n}{k-1}\binom{n-r-1}{k-2}.$$

Thus the formula for $a(n,k,r)$ follows from combining this with (0.3):

$$a(n,k,r) = \frac{n}{r}|C(n,k,r)| = \frac{n}{r}|D(n,k,r)| = \binom{n}{k-1}\binom{n-r-1}{k-2}.$$

For the assertion of the theorem about q-analogues, we first deal with the case of $a_q(n,k,r)$. Note that for any d dividing n, an r-rooted noncrossing partition of $[n]$ having k blocks has no chance of being d-fold symmetric unless r is divisible by d and k is congruent to 1 mod d. Furthermore, when these congruences hold, if one defines $n' := \frac{n}{d}, r' := \frac{r}{d}, k' := \frac{k-1}{d}$, then the map $[n] \cong \mathbb{Z}_n \to \mathbb{Z}_{n'} \cong [n']$ which reduces modulo n' gives a natural bijection between d-fold rotationally symmetric r-rooted noncrossing partitions of $[n]$ with k blocks, and r'-rooted noncrossing partitions of $[n']$ with $k'+1$ blocks. For example, in Figure (b), one has such a d-fold rotationally symmetric r-rooted noncrossing partition with $d = 2, n = 18, r = 4, k = 7$, and Figure (c) depicts the corresponding r'-rooted noncrossing partition of $[n']$ with $n' = 9, r' = 2, k' = 3$.

Hence by the first part of the theorem, there are exactly $\binom{n'}{k'}\binom{n'-r'-1}{k'-1}$ such d-fold rotationally symmetric r-rooted noncrossing partition of $[n]$ having k blocks in this case.

On the other hand, one can easily evaluate $a_q(n,k,r)$ when q is a primitive d^{th} root-of-unity for d dividing n, using the *q-Lucas theorem* (Lemma 2 below). One finds that it vanishes unless r is divisible by d and k is congruent to 1 mod d, in which case it equals $\binom{n'}{k'}\binom{n'-r'-1}{k'-1}$, as desired.

For the assertion about $a_q(n,r)$, one can either argue in a similar fashion, or use the identity $\begin{bmatrix} 2n-r-1 \\ n-r \end{bmatrix}_q = \sum_{k=1}^{n} q^{(k-1)(k-2)} \begin{bmatrix} n \\ k-1 \end{bmatrix}_q \begin{bmatrix} n-r-1 \\ k-2 \end{bmatrix}_q$, which follows from setting $M := n,\ N := n-r-1,\ \ell := n-r$ in the *q-Chu-Vandermonde summation* (see e.g. [6, (7.6)]):

$$\begin{bmatrix} M+N \\ \ell \end{bmatrix}_q = \sum_{i+j=\ell} q^{j(M-i)} \begin{bmatrix} M \\ i \end{bmatrix}_q \begin{bmatrix} N \\ j \end{bmatrix}_q .$$

□

The following straightforward lemma used in the above proof has been rediscovered many times; see [9, Theorem 2.2] for a proof and some history.

Lemma 2. *(q-Lucas theorem) Given nonnegative integers n,k,d, with $1 \leq d \leq n$, uniquely write $n = n'd+n''$ and $k = k'd+k''$ with $0 \leq n'', k'' < d$. If q is a primitve d^{th} root-of-unity, then*

$$\begin{bmatrix} n \\ k \end{bmatrix}_q = \binom{n'}{k'} \begin{bmatrix} n'' \\ k'' \end{bmatrix}_q .$$

Lastly we remark that one can derive an explicit formula for the number of 2-crossing partitions of $[n]$, but it is much messier than $a(n,r)$ above, and appears to have no q-analogue with good behavior. However, Bóna [2] does show that for each fixed k, the generating function counting k-crossing partitions of $[n]$ is a rational function of x and $\sqrt{1-4x}$.

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